The Peer Guardian Approach

Article Critique

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**Annotated Bibliography/Summary**

While bullying remains to be a problem in the schools, there have been numerous studies and interventions in the effort to combat this phenomenon. Gregory Toledo, a behavior specialist at Nantucket High School in Massachusetts, created an innovative approach to a bully intervention program. He established a peer guardian initiative approach in which the intervention plan was students helping students, without interference from teachers, administrators, parents, or law enforcement, unless necessary. The two premises of the approach were, there would be no consequences and there would be no involvement or interference from the administration.

Students were chosen for the guardian approach based upon their demonstration of empathy, fortitude, and honesty. Students were trained to intervene in various ways with safety as the highest priority. Guardians remained anonymous and were trained to use such strategies as supporting the victim and letting them know that the incident did not go unnoticed, standing close to the victim when incidents were prone to happen, or confronting the bully. Students also consulted with teachers, counselors, and administrators as to how best to handle the particular situation.

The contention of the author is that students know the dynamics of the school and student relationships much more so than adults. There is a social community among peers and they are better equipped to understand the perspective of the bully and the victim and are more aware of what bullying looks like in the school.

**Critique**

This article suggested a new approach to bully intervention, training peer guardians in becoming more aware of the school and social climate in relation to bullying. Past and current intervention models encourage students to talk to teachers, parents, or administrators if they have been a victim of bullying. Students are often times unwilling to report bullying to authorities, fearing the problem will worsen. The author makes the insightful revelation that students who report to adults may be protected within the schools, but later may become at risk for being victimized outside of the safety of the schools.

It is the students, who are the ones being bullied, the ones who are bullying, and in most instances the ones who are witnesses to the bullying. They actually have the most advantage, when it comes to understanding and addressing the problem as long as they are protected, learn how to safely intervene, and stay in constant discreet communication with an adult ally in the school.

As bullying in the schools become more covert in method, many teachers and school authorities may not even notice it as it goes on within their very presence. There are hidden messages among adolescents that only peers can relate to, detect, and understand. It is only fitting that the peers be a part of the solution.

**Reference:**

Toledo, G. (2008, December). The Guardians initiative: A student-centered approach to bullying. *Education Digest*, 74(4), p.10-15.